



COUNCIL OF ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES OF ONTARIO

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FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE

WARNING:

ONTARIO PC GOVERNMENT TERMINATES INDEPENDENT ADVISER ON CORRECTIONS REFORM

The Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO) is appalled with the recent decisions by the Ontario Progressive Conservative government to terminate the Independent Adviser on Corrections Reform, Howard Sapers. Mr. Sapers tabled his report to the previous government in 2017, highlighting over 40 recommendations needed to address issues of violence, neglect, and prisoner mistreatment. This decision begs the question; in a system that kept Christina Jahn in segregation for 210 continuous days, and failed to provide medical care for Julie Bilotta, a woman in active labour, how can the government consider eliminating an independent advisor to address the current state of corrections in Ontario?

External oversight is a human rights obligation, not a political tool.

The previous government, under the advisement of Sapers, was moving towards addressing the abhorrent state of corrections in Ontario through both legislative and institutional reform. Despite the development and acceptance of new legislation to address the issues in corrections, the law has yet to be formally adopted by the Lieutenant-Governor leaving Ontario citizens waiting to see if any of the improvements made will be brought forward by the current government. While CEFSO remains committed to the abolition of jails and prison, we recognize the important work Mr. Sapers was conducting to address serious systemic and human rights issues in Ontario's provincial jail system. In addition to providing recommendations on reform, Mr. Sapers position was politically independent and offered Ontario third-party, external oversight on the state of their corrections system.

CEFSO advocacy

In the past 12 months CEFSO has completed several on-site visits to the women's provincial jail sector across the province to monitor the conditions of confinement and to identify human rights violations. CEFSO advocates routinely provide advocacy and prisoner's rights information to currently incarcerated women to ensure that in a system that is clearly dangerous, a woman can survive. To contextualize the importance of Mr. Saper's position, CEFSO has identified several issues that are currently impacting incarcerated Canadians including strip-searching, segregation, medication cut-off, and lack of mental health care or addiction services. In addition to this, there is little to no attempt at release planning or reintegration support at the provincial level ensuring that those exiting jail are at an increased risk of returning.

The Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario would like to emphasize to the public the importance of the office of the independent adviser and encourage the government to uphold the position, recommendations and legislation towards addressing a corrections system that is in serious need of oversight and accountability.

The Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO) is the provincial voice for eight Elizabeth Fry Societies in Ontario. CEFSO monitors the conditions for both provincially and federally sentenced women in prison, through visits to jails and direct contact with women, and advocates for improvements to those conditions.

For further information or questions please contact:

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